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ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes theories of American family organization, points out social changes that have had an impact on family structure, and discusses implications of current social and political conditions for child care policy. It is suggested that monistic characterizations of the family, emphasizing self-sufficiency and only one kind of family structure, may be less viable than a pluralistic characterization that recognizes various co-occurring family structures that result from changes in the economy and in society. Several recent social changes that have altered family structures, including greater choice for women regarding childbearing and childspacing, more career opportunities for women, and inflation, are discussed. It is emphasized that for the first time in U.S. history, the typical school age child has a mother who works outside the home. Statistical data reflecting recent changes in the American family are seen as consistent with the theory of familistic plurality: the family is now characterized by (1) changing family structures, (2) less uniformity in child rearing environments, (3) a greater probability of dependence on extra-family supports, and (4) stress, especially on young single parent families. Enrollment statistics indicate that the majority of children with working mothers are in unlicensed informal child care arrangements. In conclusion, political implications of efforts to organize support systems for the transformed American family are pointed out. (Author/RH)

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THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE FAMILY: IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILD CARE POLICY

by

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TRANSFORMATION OF THE FAMILY: IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILD CARE POLICY

There can be little discussion about planning for a non-sexist society without strong consideration of the family as the basic unit of that society. To clarify, any notions of making permanent changes in role relationships between men and women, or any movement toward "equality between the sexes" must be made with parallel consideration of where and how child rearing will fit into our visions of the future.

In the extant literature on the family, three theories of American family organization are dominant. In all of these theories, role relationships of men and women fit the traditional stereotypes; men as workers, women as nurturers in society. First is the work of Parsons, Wirth and Zimmerman. The basic propositions of these three sociologists are that the American family became isolated and nuclear as a result of urbanization; in urban settings, kinship bonds of the countryside were lost and the nuclear family became the ideal structural mode for dealing with the exigencies of urban life. In this view, the urban family is defined as the conjugal family with offspring, without other relatives living in the house and without close obligations and ties to relatives who live nearby. Role relationships fit our stereotype to the extreme---where the father represented family in work, and the mother took care of the home and children sheltering them from the

hostility of the city.

A contrasting view is that American families participate actively in a kin network. Dotson, Greer, and Litwak (Winch, 1977) have each challenged the Parsonian model with field research among urban families in three different cities to find that kinfolk provide the most important companionship and recreation. Sussman and Burchinal (1962) have also found that the overwhelming majority of urban families engage in some sort of mutual aid with their parents and intergenerational continuity is greater when marriage is culturally homogamous. Litwak called families fitting this description modified extended families and felt it could be found frequently in all groups except upper middle class white Protestants. Litwak points out that with white Protestants, class and mobility are mediating variables which reduce modified extendedness in the white collar occupational range. Since this group is less likely to encounter occupational barriers than Jews and ethnic minorities, they are more likely to make trade-offs for mobility through relocation away from kin. Historically, with the ethnics and Jews, occupational mobility could be obtained by two means: participating in the family business and working in the free professions such as medicine and law. Even in the free professions, success was possible to the extent there were clients of the same background in the community.

The third point of view is that American families did not just become nuclear with urbanization, but that the American family has been nuclear and isolated for over 200

years. Both Bane (1976) and Goode (1971) have developed this position in separate works, citing data from the first census of 1790 to the present which indicates that the average American family has always lived in nuclear domesticity without other kin present in the home. Even in the Western frontier prior to urbanization, families were nuclear, not extended. Thus the nostalgia for the days when families worked together to help each other out is really a figment of our historic imagination.

The views of Litwak, Sussmann, Dotson and Greer are not mutually exclusive of those set out by Bane and Goode. It would be safe to say they differ most on matters of emphasis; which family structure exists most frequently in America, the modified extended or nuclear. Where they do differ substantively is on the matter of family supports, for with the modified extended family, the presence of kin to help with child care, finances, advice and other exchanges is a part of the survival or family functioning strategy. With the nuclear family, however, the availability of and reliance on kin for these kinds of services is unusual or atypical, resulting in the kind of isolation described by Parsons.

The work of Winch (1977), in familial organization, attempts to counter each of these monistic theories and through analysis of census data and field studies, proposes a plausible fourth point of view. The organization of American families has been and still is characterized by <u>familistic pluralism</u>. That is, nuclearity and extendedness

are both present to a significant extent in American family structure, the degree to which one or the other is present is a function of culture, class and mobility. New family forms (such as blended families, the mother-child household, and non-related living groups) stretch further the boundaries of living arrangements called family. And in addition to challenging the theories of structural dominance or presence/absence, a major theoretical question is which, if any, of these family forms really is most effective at meeting total family needs in today's society.

Though one might hypothesize that the extended family structure can offer more internal supports and workers to a family in stress, Keniston (1977) says that this is not the case for any structural form. In a rather zealously stated chapter, he argues that self-sufficiency in the family is a myth; that changes in the economy and in society are simply beyond the families' control. Over the last century, a trend has been evolving where functions that might have been a family responsibility are now the domain of institutions. Public compulsory education and the rapid development of health technology have made it possible for families to turn over what were once their domains of responsibility to societal institutions. But most important for this discussion are those paradoxical changes in society which have resulted in a impact on family structure itself. In the last fifteen years, women have had greater choice regarding child-bearing and child spacing which has freed them from the legal

and social obligation to marriage, homemaking and child-bearing as the only acceptable career choice. However, as freedom of choice to have, not have and space children came about---so did inflationary conditions require two incomes to meet the American expectation of an acceptable standard of living. In the last twenty-five years, the number of women in the workforce has more than doubled, moving women out a typical status of financial dependence to some (but not extensive) degree of independence. Two tremendous impacts on family organization are a consequence. First, role relationships between husband and wife experience a fair amoung of stress as expectations collide with reality on the issue of sharing household responsibilities and on the more important matter of staying in unhappy marriages that were forged on the female-dependent role (Hoffman and Nye, 1975; Bird, 1979). Second, children are being reared somewhat differently than in the past. Parents are not only prime agents of socialization and transmitters of the culture, but are coordinators of extra-family supports. These supports may be informal or institutional, but their main purpose is to participate in the care and supervision of someone else's children. According to Keniston, for the first time in U.S. history, the typical school age child has a mother who works outside the home. Some statistics should serve to illustrate this point.

The increase in labor force participation for women began in World War II, as a response to the need for women

to fill positions in war-related industries. Women were recruited to fill these positions for the duration of the war effort, but they were expected to return to "home as usual" when the mobilization period ended. However, these years initiated a trend in continuing work for mothers, even those with young children. Once women had entered the world of work in large numbers, they were clearly reluctant to relinquish the economic role. In 1948, approximately 13% of married women with children under the age of six years were in the labor force. Although this percentage had increased to about 18% in 1960, the curve takes a much steeper angle at this time, increasing rapidly to over 36% in 1975. As children under six are the group most likely to be in full-time child care arrangements, this change has directly affected the need for extra-family child care. But children over the age of six also need supervision for before and after-school hours, and there have been sharp increases in the percentage of working mothers for this cohort as well. In 1975 a majority of American mothers in two parent families of school age children were working--over 52%; in comparison, the 1948 rate was 26%. Strangely, this group--mothers with children between the ages of 6 to 17--are more likely to work than married women without children under 18. Perhaps inflation, with corresponding increases in the costs of raising children, has increased the pressure on these families to have two wage earners to bear the financial burden of childrearing. (See Figure I.)

For single parent families, the pressures and constraints on labor force participation are even more urgent. Unless single parents have relatives or friends to care for their children while they are working, the need for extra-family child care becomes immediate. The proportion of single parent families has been growing at a sharp, really exponential rate.

Figure II illustrates the marked rise over the past 25 years in the proportion of families with one parent present. As is obvious, that rise has been clearly greatest in the last ten years. By 1975 more than one in every six children under 18 was living in a single parent family. According to the National Academy of Sciences (1976) report on the family:

> "The increase in single parenthood has been most rapid among families with children under six. The percentage more than doubled between 1948 and 1975, from about 7 to 17%. The percentage is almost as high for families of very young children; In 1975, almost one in every seven children under three (14.5%) was living in a single parent family. The majority of single parents (98% of whom are women) are in the labor force; 72 percent of mothers with children 6-17 and 56% of those with children under six. Over 80% of those employed work full-time. Even among single parent mothers with children under three, 50% are in the labor force; of those employed, 77 percent work full-time."

The chief sources of the increase in single parent families includes rising divorce rates and rising numbers of unmarried mothers. Figure three illustrates the number of divorces and the estimated number of children involved in divorce and remarriage over a twenty year period, from 1953-1973. The national remarriage rate for divorced persons, especially women, is substantially lower than the

rate of divorced and separated for families with children. Thus, although 500,000 children were involved in a remarriage (and perhaps a blended family situation) the parents of over 1,000,000 children are divorced. One reason is that divorced men are more socially desireable as mates, where converse is still true for a woman with children. Though 129.1 men per 1000 were involved in a remarriage in 1974, only 40 per 1000 women were in the same situation. The differential rates of remarriage have been increasing over the past decade, leaving most children of divorced parents in a permanently one-parent home. This is certainly a contrast to past tradition and one that would not be picked up if we were to look at overall rather than differential rates of remarriage. Since 98% of single parents are mothers, it is also reasonable to assume that the incidence of men (who stand a better chance of remarriage) taking custody of their children is a lot smaller than some well publicized cases would lead us to believe.

Figure IV illustrates the increasing number of unmarried mothers. Next to divorce, this group is the most rapidly growing category of single parenthood. The slope of the line is particularly steep after 1970. The chart illustrates two indexes of "illegitimate" births; the solid line indicates a ratio, that is illegitimate births per 1,000 live births, and the broken line the rate per 1,000 unmarried women aged 15-44 years. The ratio has been higher and has risen more

rapidly than the rate, a trend indicating a growing proportion of unmarried women are having children, and that the percentage of unmarried women among those of childbearing age is becoming even larger.

Figure V shows the trend for single parents with children under six by age. The growth has been sharpest in the under-25 group, which is particularly relevant for child care policy, as these women are most likely to work during the early childhood years and their children are the most likely to enroll in child care programs. Included in the under-25 parents are teen parents, a painfully problematic group for the policy maker to respond to. Child care as a support for these parents is too limited a view of intervention and comprehensive programs may not make self-supporting adults out of teen mothers either. One thing is certain though, single parenthood is associated with low incomes which makes the payment of child care fees a hardship for these families. Of the 3.1 million children living in low income families ($5000 per year or less) nearly 60% were in the single parent families and 30% of these children had mothers in the labor force. Further, of the children in the next highest family-income bracket (5,000-$7,000), more than one in four lived in a single parent family, one-third of the mothers were in the labor force. It is primarily the single mother who finds herself in severely strained financial circumstances. In 1974, the median income for single mothers under 25 with children under six was only $3,021 per year.

The 500,000 mothers in this age group consituted one-third of all female headed families with children under six.

From these figures emerges a pattern consistent with Winch's theory of familistic plurality. There are changing family structures, less uniformity in child rearing environments, a greater probability of dependence on extra-family supports, and a fair amount of stress particularly on young single parent families. One crucial thread of continuity that weaves through the pattern of changing family structures is finding a way to care for children. In spite of every advance adults may make with regard to role equality, the species has a prolonged and relatively dependent childhood. Child care mechanisms have to be developed either within or as an adjunct to the family. Here is also where the theories on the structure of American families is important. Clearly, modified extended familism combined with egalitarian role relationships would be the mechanism for sustaining intra-family care, though not continuous care from the mother. This kind of arrangement is one which operates on the assumption that child care is close to or synonomous with child rearing; that the caretaker is or should be regarded as a mother-substitute.

Actually, these assumptions may be steeped more in tradition and custom than in any reality that caretaking by other than the mother is harmful. The work of Kagan et al. (1977) and Farran and Ramey (1977) points out that mother-child attachment is not negatively influenced by child care.

And Rossi (1977) suggests that the bond between infant and mother is biological in character---not threatened by good caretaking arrangements. Although exact data are not available, it can be deduced from the enrollment statistics of children in licensed programs around the country, that the overwhelming majority of children with working mothers are in unlicensed informal arrangements (Abt Associates, 1978, Robins and Weiner, 1978). One could assume that parents choose that arrangement to keep costs down, increase convenience and maintain a non-institutional milieu for the child which is congruent with the family value systems.

Family structure does not always permit care by next of kin or consistent care from friends and neighbors. Increasingly, as with education, health care, and family subsistence, parents are calling for publicly supported mechanisms to assist with the care of their children. The actual demand for institutional support of child care is determined by two factors: the availability of existing care and the cost of the care. Fees for private child care are as high as $110 per week for in-home care and average about $26 per week for center-based care (Abt Associates, 1978). When one compares that cost of care with the statistics on income (for single mothers in particular), the situation is grave. In two parent families where one income has the family in poverty, the addition of a second income puts that family above the national average. Certainly, in Black families, 70% of those with household incomes at and above the median were two working parent

households (Hill, 1972). But the cost of care is the third largest item in the household budget and it is a cost that does not go away for about twelve years.

Although it may be easy to establish a need for child care, establishing a need for the government to get involved in family business is not so simple. Despite our national experience in social services, the United States is, according to Kamerman and Kahn (1978) a reluctant participant in the area of family policy, doing so in starts and spurts when politically acceptable or absolutely necessary.

As a consequence, a sense of uniformity, regularity and even intentionality to support family development is missing from a plethora of related but not always coordinated social services. Child care is no exception and in many ways reflects the reluctance of the goverment to adopt a consistent or explicit stand on family development.

In California, which offers more child care than most other states in the country, there are 17 ways parents get care for their children. Approximately 120,000 children participate in State-supported child care programs. Half (46%) (60,893) of them are income eligible children in the first five program categories which are sponsored by the Department of Education. The other half (69,545) are AFDC recipients who are subsidized by the Welfare Department (Income disregard WIN and vendor programs). An unknown number of children are enrolled in private centers, licensed by the State Department of Health and in family day care which is licensed by County

Social Services. Then there are seven informal arrangements which are providing care for an estimated 75% of all children. Not only is the non-system confusing, it really does not offer the choice and diversity to parents seeking care which is implied by the presence of 17 arrangements. Only the low-income of certain categories on a first come, first served basis have access to publicly supported care. Only the moderate to upper income can afford private fee-for-service care. And everybody else tries to match their optimum desire with what they can get and afford. All of these formal and informal fee-for-service arrangements are indirectly supported through the income tax credit. Marver and Larson (1978) estimate this indirect support of child care amounted to $346 million in 1977, $363 million in 1978, and $483 million in 1981.

What does the future look like? Well, it looks as though the polemics of having or expanding child care are moot. Precluding a devastating depression, women with children are in the workforce to stay. The effort which flows from this reality is to organize support systems for the transformed family which responds to our present and future societal conditions. How the public and private sectors expand their role is what is left for debate. And in this debate lies a Catch-22.

Advocates of maximum parental choice can use these ideals to disguise basic opposition to increasing service and regulating these services. Those who want to keep costs down must do so knowing that lower costs are axiomatically related

to an exploitative wage structure and large group size.[1] While most experts in child care want diveristy to be the by-word of service, the system must also be understandable to the parent. In order to mainstream day care a graduated subsidy structure based on parent net income (which extracts large proportionate fees against subsidy) may be desireable. Yet competing demands for dollars may not allow sufficient revenue for child care to permit mainstreaming as a goal. Finally, before expanding service, organizing the current non-system of child care seems imperative. But activists fear a pause to reorganize will mean a permanent halt to growth.

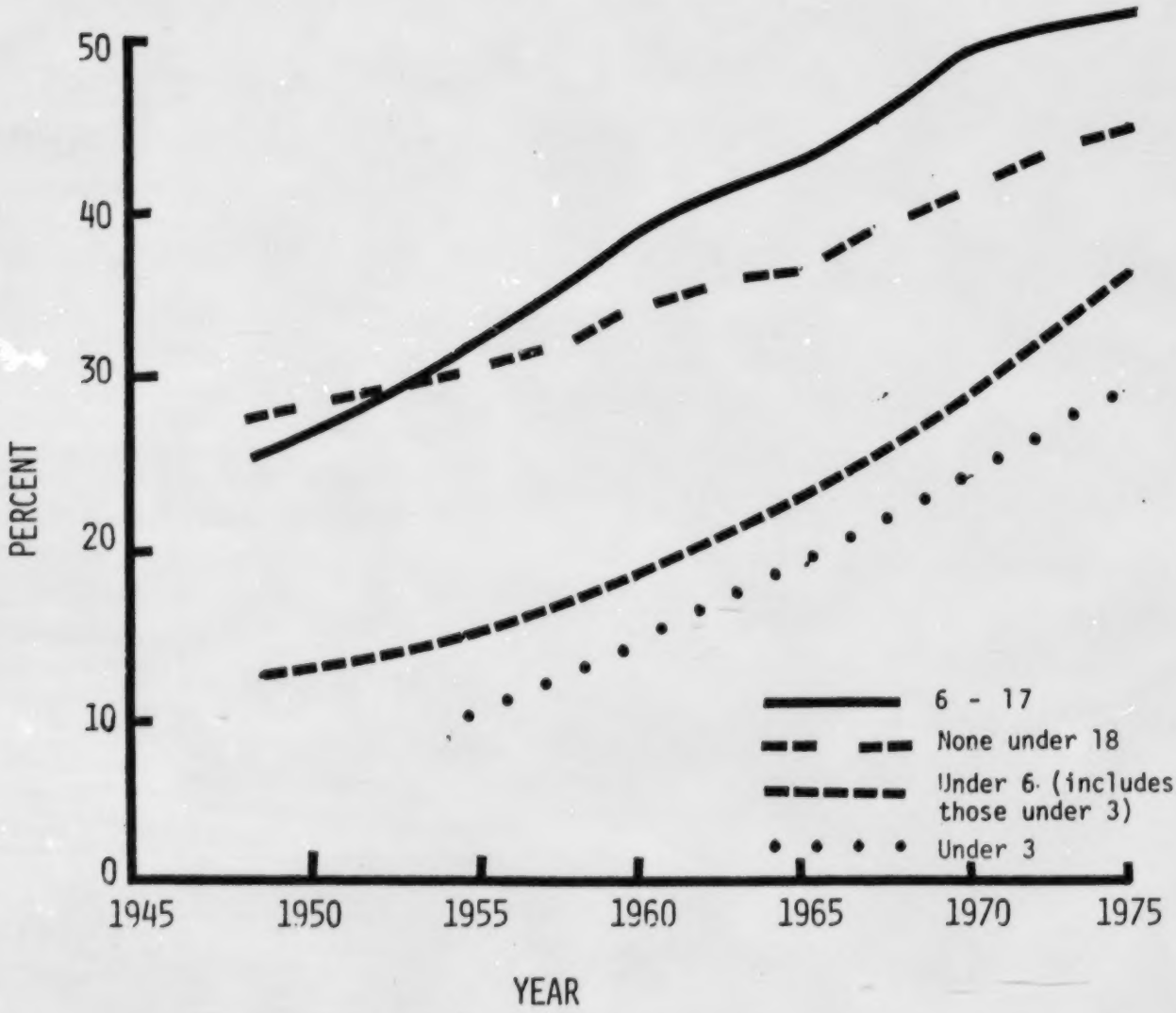
The "Catch-22" is further compounded by the political agendas behind the child care movement. According to Marver and Larson (1978) the demand for day care is tied to a number of political agendas besides making childhood reasonably good for children. They include getting welfare rolls reduced, increasing women's participation in the labor force, and increasing jobs in child care as a profession. Advocates, of course, have a hard time reconciling the ends of these disparate groups. Furthermore, the public mood toward spending and the pro-family backlash have helped kill both pieces of federal legislation that would have expanded services. In this political atmosphere, it is unlikely that new federal legislation will be forthcoming until 1981, shifting responsibility for child care to the States and to the consumer.

[1]The reader is referred to the recently completed Abt Center Study for alternative policy recommendations on costs as a function of group size and wage structures.

The consumers of child care are families---not just the child or just the mother. Unfortunately, however, responsibility for child care has alway fallen squarely on the shoulders of working mothers who must fight their guilt about leaving their children in care; cope with inter-role conflict; and raise the consciousness of men (who rarely have child care problems) and other women who view child care pejoratively. Advocates, as representatives for parents, can push for expansion to the extent support from the community is forthcoming. Experts can offer objective information about what program models and delivery systems work best. But pressure on legislators seems to be the ultimate key for expansion of publicly supported services. And the only way to turn that key is for the child care community to inform their legislators that a vote against child care will be returned by votes against them in the next election.

FIGURE I

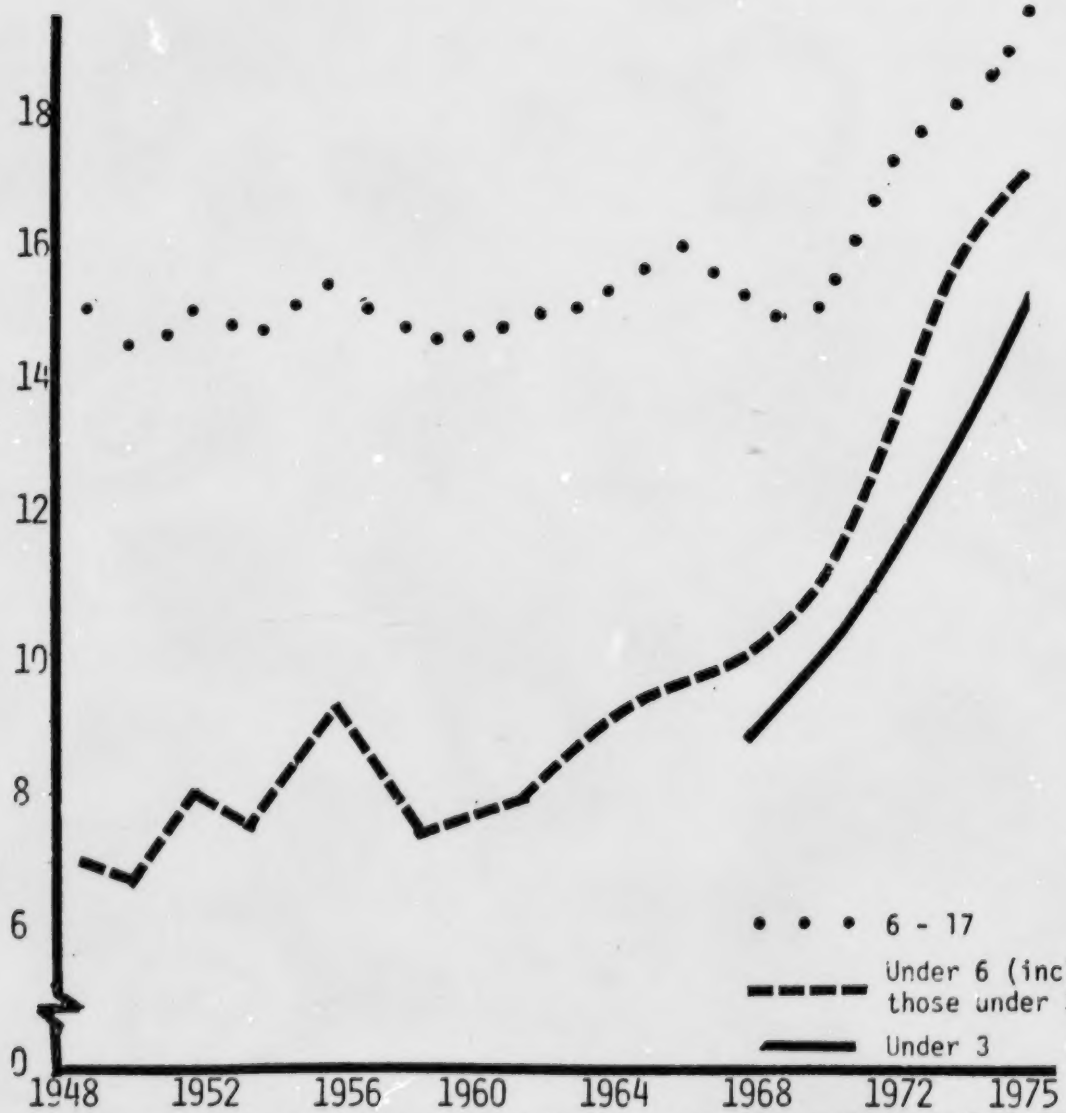
LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATES FOR MARRIED WOMEN
BY PRESENCE AND AGE OF CHILDREN



From: National Academy of Sciences, Toward a National Policy for Children and Families, 1976.

FIGURE II

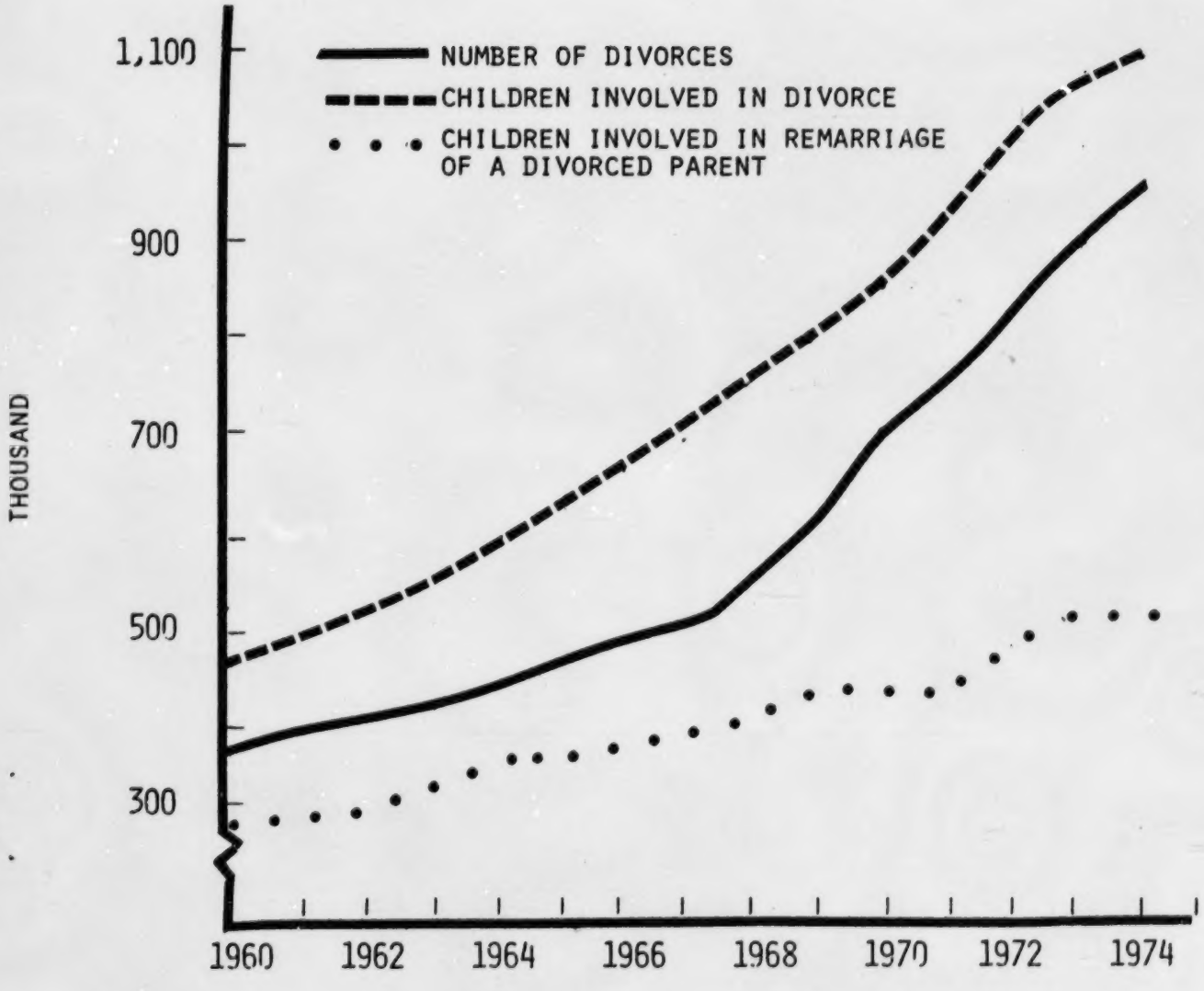
SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES AS A PERCENTAGE OF ALL FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN UNDER 18



From: National Academy of Sciences, Toward a National Policy for Children and Families, 1976.

FIGURE III

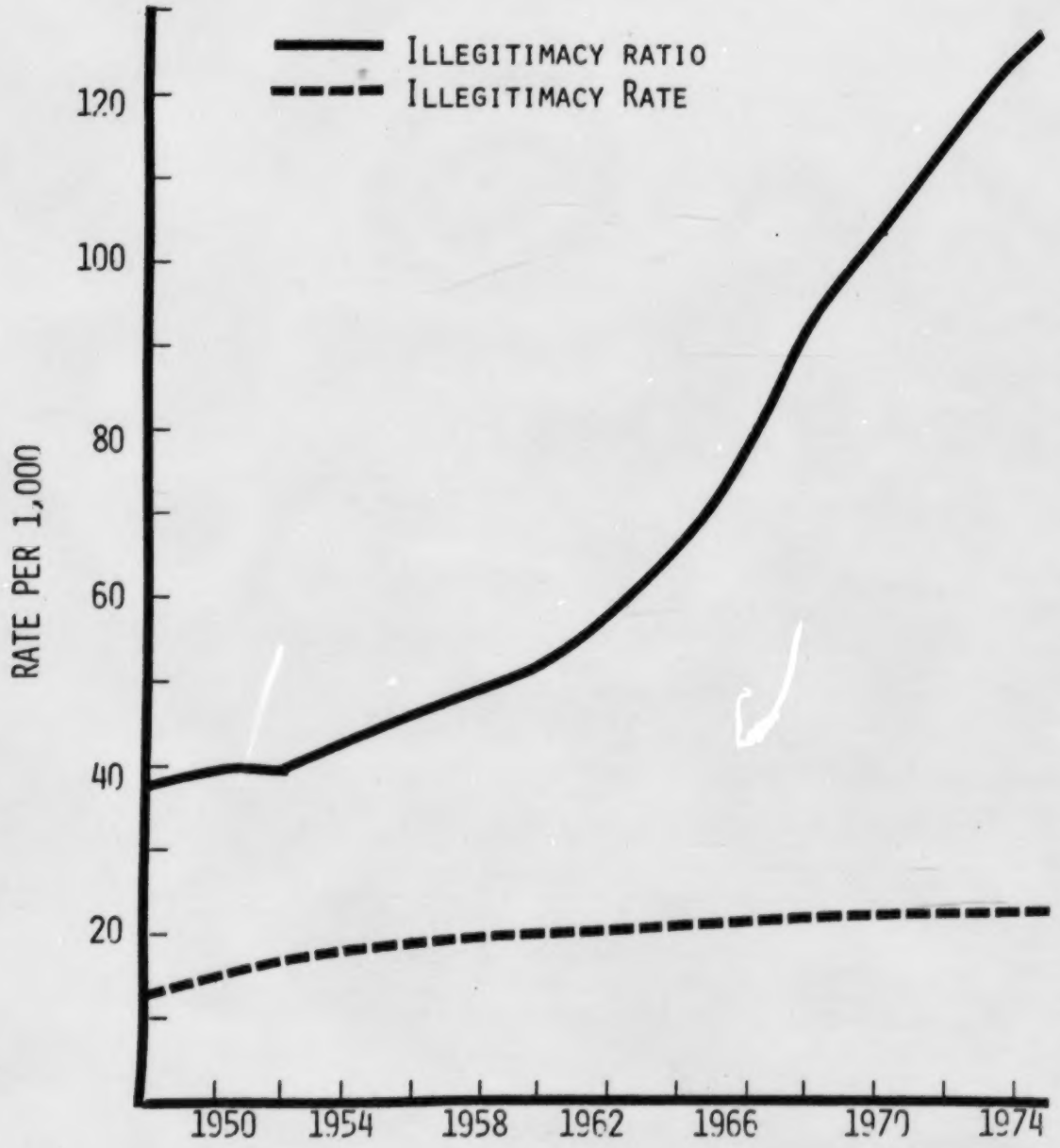
NUMBER OF DIVORCES AND ESTIMATED NUMBER OF CHILDREN INVOLVED IN DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE



From: National Academy of Sciences, Toward a National Policy for Children and Families, 1976.

FIGURE IV

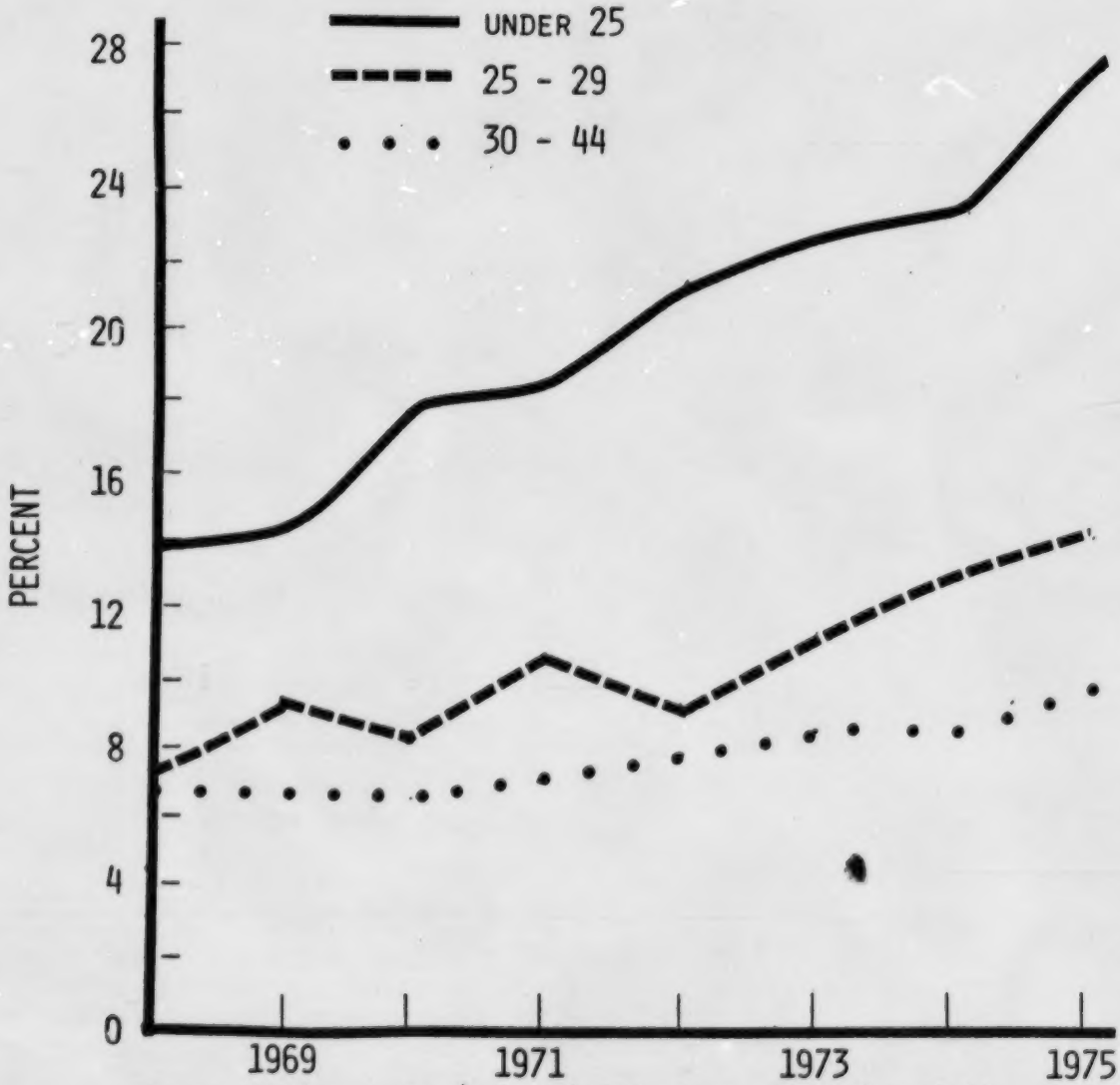
ILLEGITIMATE BIRTHS PER 1,000 LIVE BIRTHS
(RATIO) AND PER 1,000 UNMARRIED WOMEN (RATE)



From: National Academy of Sciences, Toward a National Policy for Children and Families, 1976.

FIGURE V

PERCENTAGE OF SINGLE PARENT FAMILY HEADS
WITH CHILDREN UNDER SIX BY AGE OF FAMILY HEAD



From: National Academy of Sciences, Toward a National Policy for Children and Families, 1976.

FIGURE VI

CHILD CARE ALTERNATIVES IN CALIFORNIA[1]

SUBSIDIZED ARRANGEMENTS

1. State Department of Education

Program:	GENERAL CHILD CARE	CAMPUS CHILD CARE	SCHOOL AGE PARENTING	MIGRANT CHILD CARE	ALTERNATIVE CHILD CARE
No. of Children:	47,463	3,496	511	2,061	7,362

2. State Welfare Department

Program:	AFDC INCOME DISREGARD	WELFARE	VENDOR
No. of Children	61,000 (est.)	4,413	4,132

PRIVATE FORMAL (LICENSED) ARRANGEMENTS

1. State Department of Health

   Program: CENTER CARE & NURSERY SCHOOLS

   No. of Children: Unknown

2. County Welfare Departments

   Program: FAMILY DAY CARE

   No. of Children: Unknown

INFORMAL (UNLICENSED) ARRANGEMENTS

Arrangements:	PARENT CO-OP	IN HOME RELATIVE	OUT OF HOME RELATIVE	IN HOME NON RELATIVE	OUT OF HOME NON RELATIVE	UNLICENSED FAMILY DAY CARE	LATCH KEY
No. of Children:	Unknown						

[1]"Subsidized Child Care in California" State Department of Education, Office of Child Development. Frances Walker, Director, 1978.

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